

As In the Long Ago

By VIRGINIA LEILA WENTZ

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Grown weary of his reading, Kent Harding glanced across the deck. There a slender, girlish figure leaning idly over the rail caught his attention. Although the veil of her youthful cap was down and it was possible to distinguish only the vague outline of her profile, something in the graceful pose of her head, in the tip of the shell-like ear and in the lustrous brown hair that gleamed in the red shade of the setting sun made him think of a girl whom he had known in the long ago.

"By Jove! I wonder if it could be," he speculated, looking at her sharply and blinking through the smoke from his pipe.

Just then she raised her veil and turned. Harding saw that she was, in fact, the selfsame girl. She knew him instantly as he came forward, and they shook hands heartily, as became old friends.

"Of course, when we get back to New York, you'll come and see me," continued Vittoria after they had talked of many things. "You know, when brother married, I issued my declaration of independence. It's a dear little box of a house in Greenwich village. All alone? Why, to be sure. That's the principle upon which I made my stand—a woman against the world."

She smiled as she spoke, and her teeth glistened prettily in two little rows.

"Sounds more terrifying than it really is," she went on without giving him a chance to throw in, "for the bachelor maid has only to acknowledge to thirty and the world tosses up the sponge at once. It doesn't take to continue a fight after it's ceased to be interesting."

But Harding had put his beloved pipe in one corner of his mouth and was going through an elaborate pantomime of counting on his fingers. "Nine and twenty," he corrected.

Vittoria colored slightly and stammered nonchalantly on the arm of her steamer chair. "What an appalling memory!" said she.

Whereupon they both laughed, and a little silence fell.

"Nine years," observed Harding suddenly. He had been stretched out lazily in his chair, his hands beneath his curly head, his gray eyes staring straight into the glory of the western heavens. "It's a good size, isn't it, if one hasn't accomplished—"

In the midst of his sentence he saw Vittoria nod to some one. Following the direction of her eyes, he perceived a tall, blond girl, smartly gowned and of rather haughty demeanor, walking briskly toward them. A maid followed more slowly with a steamer rug and an armful of wraps.

"Ah, it's Marion," he exclaimed half to himself. And to Vittoria, "Do you know her?"

"Our acquaintance is only a bowing one," volunteered Vittoria coldly. "I met her last month in Switzerland."

"Hello, Kent," cried Miss Marion Lane carelessly, as he rose to greet her. From beneath her gray lashes she glanced at Vittoria indifferently and nodded slightly again. "You can join mother and me when you like—no hurry," she murmured amiably as she swept on down the deck, where her maid deposited her rug and wraps beside an alert looking little widow in black.

"I'm engaged to Miss Lane," Harding said oddly at length. "At least, I've asked her to marry me."

"You?" cried Vittoria incredulously. Then a change took place in her feminine mind. "And her answer?" she asked simply.

"She's considering it. In the meantime, of course, it's a secret."

"Of course," said he, a bit shamefacedly. "It must seem strange that I—to say this to you—he stammered.

"No, I understand," she said quietly. And then she listened with incredulous patience to his foolish rhapsodies. There never was such an adorable creature as Marion—such wealth of tenderness and undiscovered charm.

Shortly afterward Harding took his leave. The twilight was fast coming on, and Vittoria sat for a long time leaning over the rail again. She was looking thoughtfully long ago.

Now there was once a girl, and she was barely seventeen—oh, sentimental to be sure! And he was a nice boy home from college on his senior vacation. She had cared for him, for he was a nice boy and had such manly, honest gray eyes. And then one summer day as they had stood alone in the old fashioned garden he had kissed her. Ah, how unforgettablely vivid was the background—the gold of the sunflowers and the crimson of the hollyhocks!

And the next day they had walked over to the village, where he got her a foolish little ring set with blue stones, "because blue means true love," said he. Just a boy and girl affair. And the next week the boy had been whisked off on a continental tour and had contemplated the University Settlement.

Finally, however, he had compromised with parental authority by going in strenuously for football.

Football as a specific for lovesickness! Vittoria laughed softly at the remembrance. But it had cured him. When three years later they had met again she saw that the episode with the sunflower and hollyhock background was already too remote to occasion even momentary embarrassment. The knowledge that he'd forgotten had hurt a little. Yes, if one were to be honest, nine years ago it really had hurt a good deal.

That night in the darkness of her

stateroom Vittoria drew out that foolish little ring from its secret hiding place and cried a bit over it. She wasn't so very far removed from the girl of seventeen after all.

Five weeks had gone by and Kent Harding was still waiting for his answer from the unfathomable Miss Lane. In the meantime Vittoria's little "box of a home" in Greenwich village had seen a good deal of him, for Vittoria had proved herself such a staunch and sincere little friend that he had elected to make her the confidant of his passion for another woman. Five weeks, and then gradually she had perceived a curious silence on Harding's part—a constant inclination, when Miss Lane was alluded to, to change the topic of conversation.

One night Vittoria had given a small dinner party. Harding, being privy for the sake of old times, had outstayed the other guests. He seemed a bit abstracted, and it was a long time before he could get his cigar to draw properly. The silence somehow to Vittoria took on a terrifying tension. She strove for some light thing to say. Suddenly Harding looked up from his cigar.

"Vittoria!" he said and put out his hand and touched hers.

"She was gorgeous tonight, gorgeous," observed Vittoria meditatively. "Who? Why, Marion Lane, stupid!"

Harding gazed at her bewilderedly for a second. "Why, yes, I dare say she was," he admitted.

A day or two later Vittoria was reading a newspaper. Her hand trembled slightly as she laid it down. Then, her dimpled chin in her palm, gazing into the firelight, she passed mentally through a panorama of events.

A man had entered so quietly that she only knew of his presence when he came and bent over her chair. Like a child caught in wrongdoing, her first thought was to rid herself of incriminating evidence. In an instant she was on her feet trying to hide the newspaper which announced Miss Lane's engagement to an army officer.

"I have seen it," announced Harding quietly. "and—I still live, you see."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, stepping back with a little start. In a few moments she excused herself to give some orders to her maid. When she returned Harding met her with a solemn but lightened face.

"It wasn't only Marion Lane who found out something in the time we've been waiting," said he. "I've found out something too."

"Don't!" she cried appealingly, and she put up her hand as if to close him out of her sight.

"I found out that it was you I wanted, not Marion or any one else, but you—you as in the long ago. You haven't forgotten, have you, sweet heart?"

The sunflowers and the hollyhocks in the background were all gold and crimson. Then the mist cleared as, reverently, he took her hand and drew it from her eyes.

"No, I haven't forgotten," said she simply. And her wet lashes knew that it was so.

Guest Weddings.

"It is hard to look over my record of marriage services without continuous merriment," wrote the Rev. John Henry Barrows, president of Oberlin college. In a memoir of her father's life Miss Barrows gives some of his experiences in his own words.

"I recall the marriage where the awkward father of the bride, who was himself nearly seven feet tall, tried to kneel when his daughter knelt and who required help after the benediction to bring him to his feet again."

"I remember the loving groom who had come to my house to be wed and who, after the ceremony, tenderly remarked: 'I found I have no friends here, doctor. I should be so glad if you would kiss her.'"

"I think of the young man in church who walked with five other young men up one aisle, while the bride and five other young ladies walked up the other aisle, the two forming a straight military line before the altar, and who, when I whisperingly asked him his first name, replied in loud tones, 'I do,' and who at the close of the service took out a two dollar bill and presented it in the presence of the entire congregation."

"I think of the couple whom I called by wrong names, saying, 'Do you, George?' 'Do you, Martha?' when I was really addressing John and Jane."

In hurriedly glancing over the license I had read the names of the bride's father and mother instead of those of the bride and groom."

A Story of Edwin Forrest.

Edwin Forrest, the great actor, was at Columbus, O., on one of his tours. It was in the railroad station at midnight. It was cold, bleak, biting weather, and the old fellow hobbled up and down the platform, but there was no easy even in his very hoarse. An undertaker's wagon pulled up at the station and a corpse was removed from it. The baggage man carelessly hustled the body into his dray and wheeled it down the platform. As he halted, old Forrest broke out into the most horrible cursing, and with his tongue lashed the baggage man for his careless handling of the human clay. Then he turned, approached the corpse and broke into the oration of Mark Antony over the body of Caesar. No one was there but the frightened baggage man and a handful of actors. The great actor's voice rose and fell and the spiteful tears and resolute thunder of the oration awoke the echoes of the station as a grand organ in a majestic cathedral. He read every line of the oration and said in an aside speech at a climactic: "There, take that, you poor clay in the coffin. I'll be dead myself inside a year." And he was.

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